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A Note from the Conference Minister

A Thanksgiving Reflection

Dear Friends,

In this season of thanksgiving, my mind has turned to the Chinese benediction, "may you live in interesting times". These are interesting times as our nation struggles to emerge from a deep economic recession, a recession that has exacted a great cost in human suffering, as people lose homes and jobs, children go hungry, schools are increasingly overcrowded, and much more. These times have challenged our churches, some of which have seen giving drop, and the growing need for ministry in the face of human crisis. Sometimes the sense of scarcity of this season casts a shadow on the abundance with which we are blessed. In this season, yes, I am deeply grateful of those essential parts of my life; my family, the joy of serving my call to ministry, friends from across the years and places, yes.

However, in this letter I would lift up another part of the abundance that pours from the hand of God. In a word that is you... you, the people and the churches of the Southeast Conference. We knew as we worked on the Conference budget for the year 2009 that these would be challenging times, and we planned accordingly. But through the year I have seen our churches put the mission of the United Church of Christ first time after time. Yesterday I received a call congratulating me that this Conference had given the biggest increase in One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) of UCC conferences in 2009. That same call thanked me for the particular generosity of Pleasant Hill Community UCC, TN, for having the highest per capita giving to OGHS of all churches in the UCC. The giving to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) Basic Support, which was at an historical high in 2008, remains as strong in 2009. The Friends of the Conference effort inviting individual giving to OCWM and other ministries of the Conference has brought a generous response from you. The first returns of pledges from leaders to the Campaign to Expand the Ministry and Mission of the Conference have been extraordinarily. The churches and people of the Conference have been generous not only with dollars, but with time and commitment.

In the end, this is not about money, but about a vision, a vision of another kind of world, place where there is no ambiguity about the "all" when we say "all are invited", where the love of God is lived, and the spirit of justice to which Christ calls us is honored. May we together be worthy of So, thank you for all that you do to build our beloved church.

Peace,
Tim Downs



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